5.2.9

Motion of Condolence and Resolution by Members

5.2.9.1 Motion of Condolence: The Members of the Commission are aware of the sad loss to the world of History and in the field of Archives as also to the Commission by the demise of very distinguished personages who have been associated with this Commission at one time or the other namely -

(i) Dr. Niharranjan Ray, Calcutta University, Calcutta and

(ii) Dr. K.K. Datta, Patna University, Patna.

Resolution: "The Members of the Indian Historical Records Commission assembled at Ahmedabad for the 48th Session of the Commission deeply mourn the death of Dr. Niharranjan Ray and Dr. K.K. Datta and resolve that sincere condolences of the Commission be conveyed to the next of their kin".

5.2.9.2

Resolutions by Members

5.2.9.2.1

Preservation of Records

5.2.9.2.1.1

Preservation, Checklisting and Cataloguing of Manuscripts and Records of Certain Premier Scientific Institutions in Calcutta

Resolution by Dr. Barun De

The Indian Historical Records Commission recommends to the National Archives of India that it take note of records of certain Government Departments concerned with scientific activity and the survey of information, such as the Botanical Survey of India, the Geological Survey of India and of other private societies, such as the Agro-Horticultural Society of India, Asiatic Society, the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science and the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and prevails upon them to set up small archival cells in each organisation for the maintenance of valuable archival material and records concerning the origins of modern science in India; and that it initiates activities with regard to inspection of these records with a view to proper checklisting and cataloguing as well as microfilming for preservation in the National Archives, as far as possible.

Explanatory Note: For a long time it has been vaguely known that there are masses of official and demi-official correspondence preserved in the record sections of two oldest Surveys

of India set up by the British Imperial Government for the purpose of assessing the natural resources of India. However, this material has never been properly surveyed and its value as records has never been assessed by archival skill. At one time, the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal took in interest in the history of science in India and as a fall out of this there was a publication by Dr. K.P. Biswas, Curator of the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta of material in the Botanical Gardens relating to the origins of modern European style botany in Calcutta. However, very little follow up has been done on Dr. Biswas's work. By the same token, it has been sporadically known that there are valuable collections of private records relating to the history of science in private repositories in Calcutta, such as the manuscripts and notes of the late Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray's History of Indian Chemistry in the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and old records and Minute Books of the Asiatic Society at 1, Park Street, etc. About six years ago, a proposal was put up from the Asiatic Society for a grant by the Indian Council of Historical Research in proper order and as far as the memory of my Membership of Council goes, this proposal was duly processed and perhaps a small grant was sanctioned. No further information was available on that count. In general, consolidated information is necessary for scholars wishing to work on the history of science in India relating to the availability of such records in the old British Indian capitals.

Recently, Shri Deepak Kumar, a Research Scholar of Kurukshetra and Delhi, who is preparing his Ph.D. thesis on

the History of Science in 19th Century India has found a variety of records in different repositories in Calcutta and his survey deserves to be taken in public notice.

For instance, in the Botanical Survey of India (Shibpur, Howrah District), the higher authorities did not appear to know that the Survey has a record room. The Librarian on the other hand gave the information that there existed about 20,000 letters of correspondence of Robert Kyd, Roxburgh, Nathaniel Wallich and others (all noted Botanists of the early 19th century) with the British authorities in Calcutta, including the Government of Bengal, and certain leading botanists in other parts of the world. Initial permission to inspect the records was difficult to obtain, but the Deputy Director in charge of the Botanical Gardens was kind enough to let Shri Kumar visit his establishment office where masses of manuscripts were piled in heaps on a wooden plank suspended in the air near the ceiling. Many old files which had been stacked on the ground floor had been destroyed when flood waters of the River Hooghly entered the premises in October 1978. Better preservation and cataloguing of these manuscripts would be invaluable for the history of botany in India.

At the Geological Survey of India at Jawaharlal Nehru Road, Calcutta, preservation and maintenance is better, since there is a formal library. However, here also the old manuscripts are gathering dust and moth for want of adequate archival care and to the best of my knowledge no sound catalogue is available in print. However, the Geological Survey of India

records comprise the history of industrial mineral prospects all over India as a part of the economic efforts of British colonialism.

There are no record rooms as such in the Asiatic Society, and in the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, one of which was set up in the 18th century and other in the 19th century. It would be interesting to know what has happened to their correspondence which originated at the time of their establishment and during the long course of their development.

It is however refreshing to find the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India carefully maintaining its old records and books. But the manuscripts have not been catalogued or checklisted.

Bangiya Sahitya Parishad is a private Society with an invaluable library of rare manuscripts and books, started in the late 19th century with its first President, R.C. Dutt, I.C.S., Shri Kumar mentions that he was astounded to find the Parishad asking for Rs.6/- per page for arranging xerox copies of a particular tract. Re.1/- was the actual charge at market price, but Rs.5/- more was asked as a donation for the Society which has exiguous funds.

In view of these circumstances, and also in view of the fact that a study of such documents and tracts can lead to a better understanding of material conditions of our country and our people in the 19th century, a salvage operation on a coordinated scale should be carried out. The following steps may be taken:-

(i) It would certainly not be advisable to shift the bulk of the documents to the National Archives and indeed to any central point in Calcutta, in view of the scarcity of funds for the purpose. It would be better if the premier scientific institutions with a historical tradition, such as the Survey of India at Dehra Dun (whose records were initially analysed by Col. Phillimore), the Geological Survey of India and the Botanical Survey of India at Howrah were requested by Government to create small archival cells in their respective departments, each with one or two archivists, so that their treasures could be properly catalogued and preserved. A total preservation of every document is not advocated. The help of professional historians, to be formed into a committee for this purpose by the National Archives of India, could easily be obtained for sifting the materials.

(ii) As the creation of archival cells might prove to be a long drawn affair, a compact mobile group of archivists and historians should immediately be formed as an urgent measure to make on-the-spot surveys in and around the metropolitan cities and advise ways and means for immediate salvage operations.

(iii) Most large Government institutions have reprographic facilities, but this is not the case in autonomous and private ones. For instance, the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India have extremely rich collections but have no means to reproduce or reprograph, particularly old and brittle ones. It is suggested that Government or bodies like the Indian

Council of Historical Research could give grants for purchase of xerox machines to financially weak and historically rich institutions to be identified by the group mentioned in para (ii) above and thereby encourage reprography or duplication of material already on the verge of extinction. The National Archives of India should, also as an urgent measure, take up a project for microfilming such materials.

Standing Committee's views:

The Archival Policy Resolution issued by the Government of India in 1972 provides that "all records and files selected for permanent preservation should be transferred to the National Archives of India 25 years after being closed or recorded, as laid down in the Manual of Office Procedure". Accordingly the records of the Central Government in the custody of the Botanical Survey of India and Geological Survey of India are to be transferred to the National Archives of India. The National Archives of India is in correspondence with the aforesaid institutions in this behalf.

The remaining institutions referred to in the Explanatory Note are either autonomous or private bodies and as such National Archives of India may be approached to tender technical advice to these institutions, if and when required.

5.2.9.2.1.2

Preservation of the National Sample Survey Records in the Department of Statistics

Resolution by Dr. D.P. Bhattacharya

Resolved that the Commission moves the Department of Statistics for preservation of the National Sample Survey Records in a proper form.